



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

For Information Contact Public Affairs
Wyn Hornbuckle
Telephone: (602) 514-7625
Cell: (602) 525-2681

FOREST SERVICE EMPLOYEE PLEADS GUILTY TO SETTING ILLEGAL WILDFIRE

PHOENIX-- On October 30, 2006, Van Bateman, 55, of Flagstaff, Arizona, pleaded guilty to setting timber afire on the Coconino Forest in federal district court in Phoenix.

Bateman admitted to starting the Boondock Fire on June 23, 2004 without Forest Service authorization. He then left the area of the fire knowing it would grow and continue to burn.

Paul Charlton, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona, said, "With this plea, Bateman joins a small universe of firefighters who, for reasons we may never fully understand, violated the public's trust by igniting fires, not extinguishing them."

A conviction for setting timber afire carries a maximum penalty of five year(s), a \$250,000 fine or both. In determining an actual sentence, Judge Rosenblatt will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Sentencing is set before Judge Rosenblatt on January 22, 2007 at 9:30 a.m.

The investigation preceding the indictment was conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture Office of the Inspector General with assistance from Forest Service, Law Enforcement and Investigations. The prosecution is being handled by Kimberly M. Hare, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Ariz.

CASE NUMBER: CR-05-1190-PCT-PGR
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